

Mapping the Belief System Landscape

Mark J. Brandt
Tilburg University



tbslaboratory.com



When considering the social landscapes of the
21st century, we need to also include the
landscape of people's belief systems

Attitude

Belief

Idea

Value

Attitude

Taxation

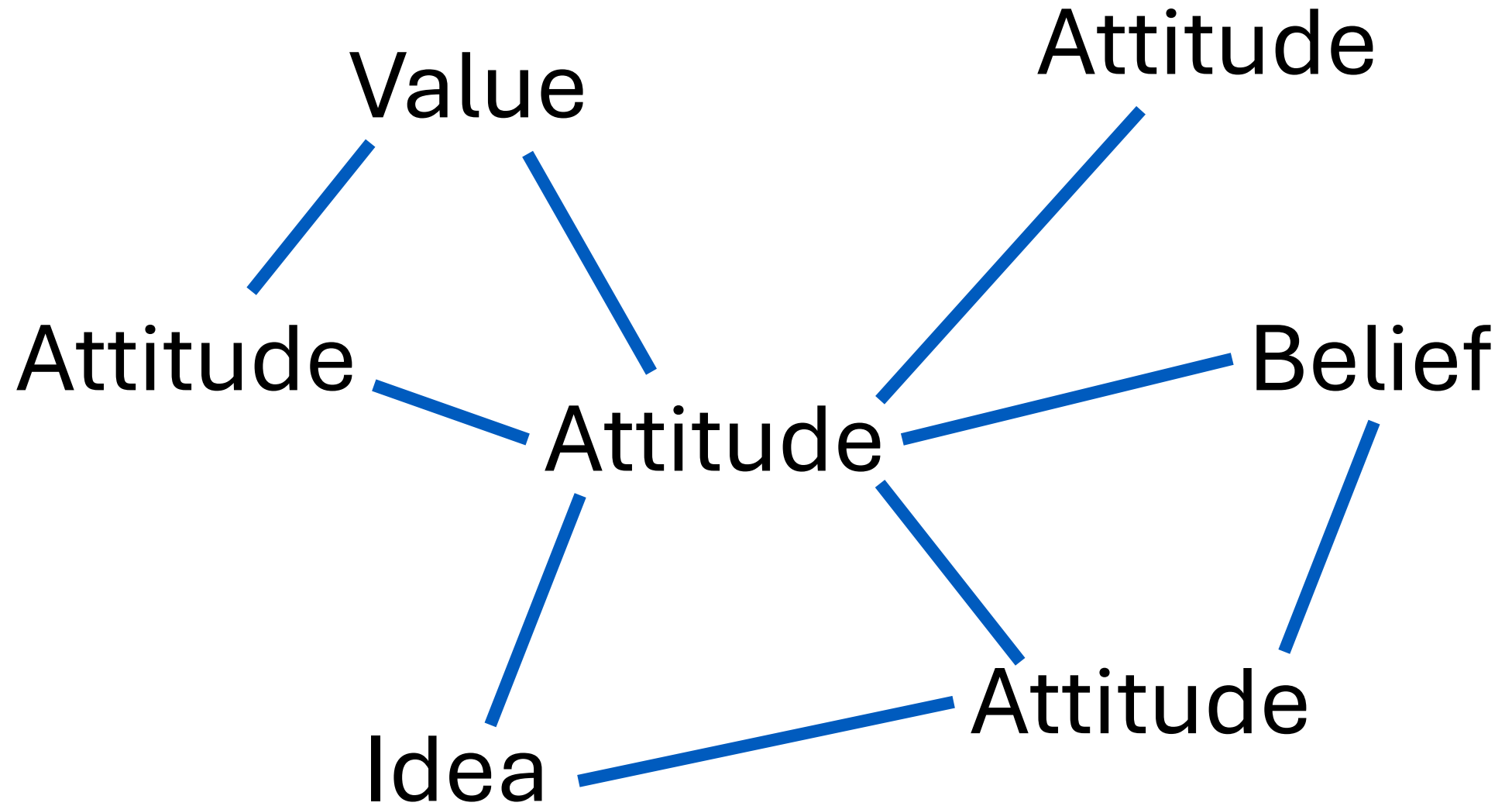
Belief in God

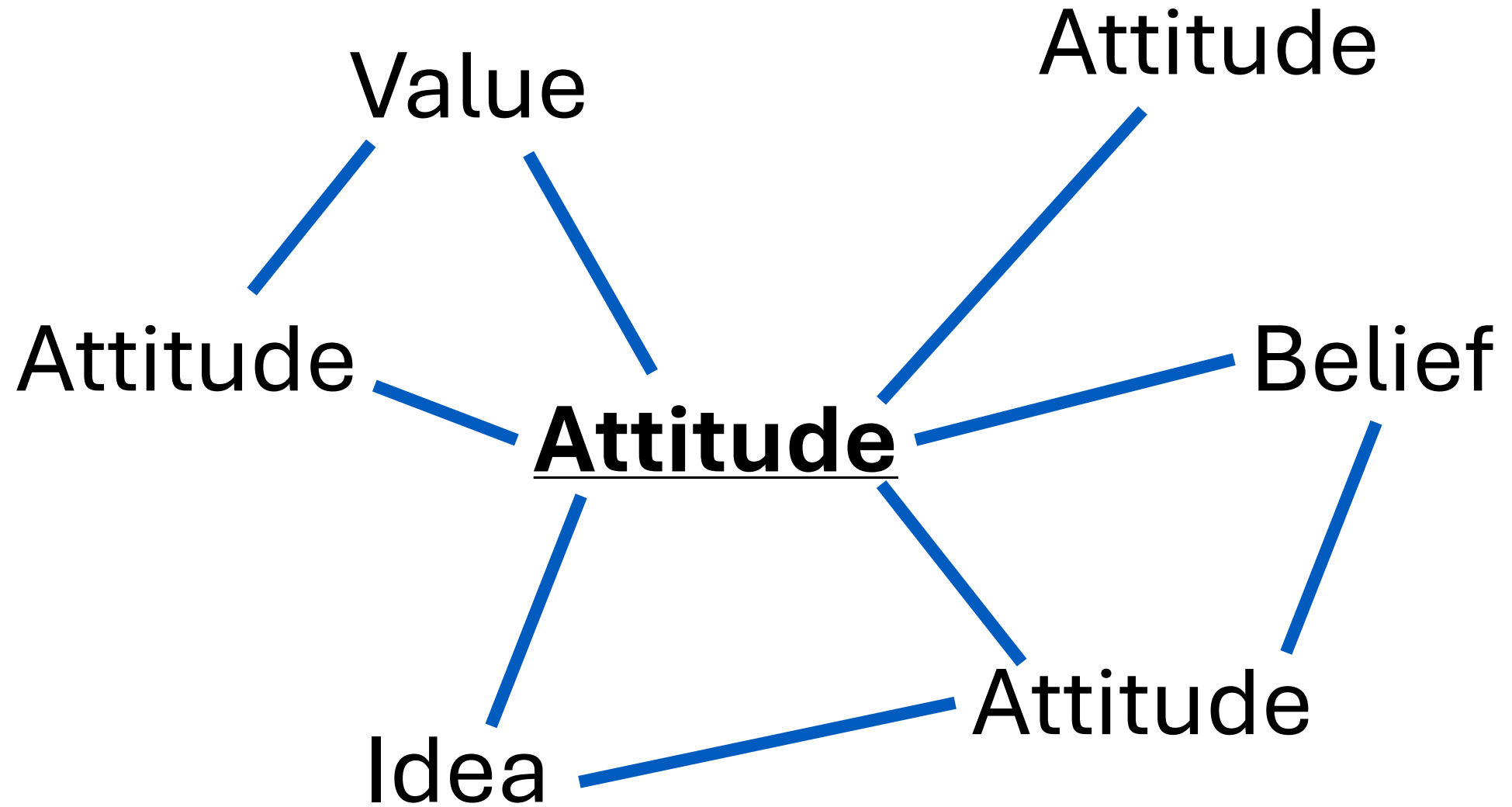
Immigration

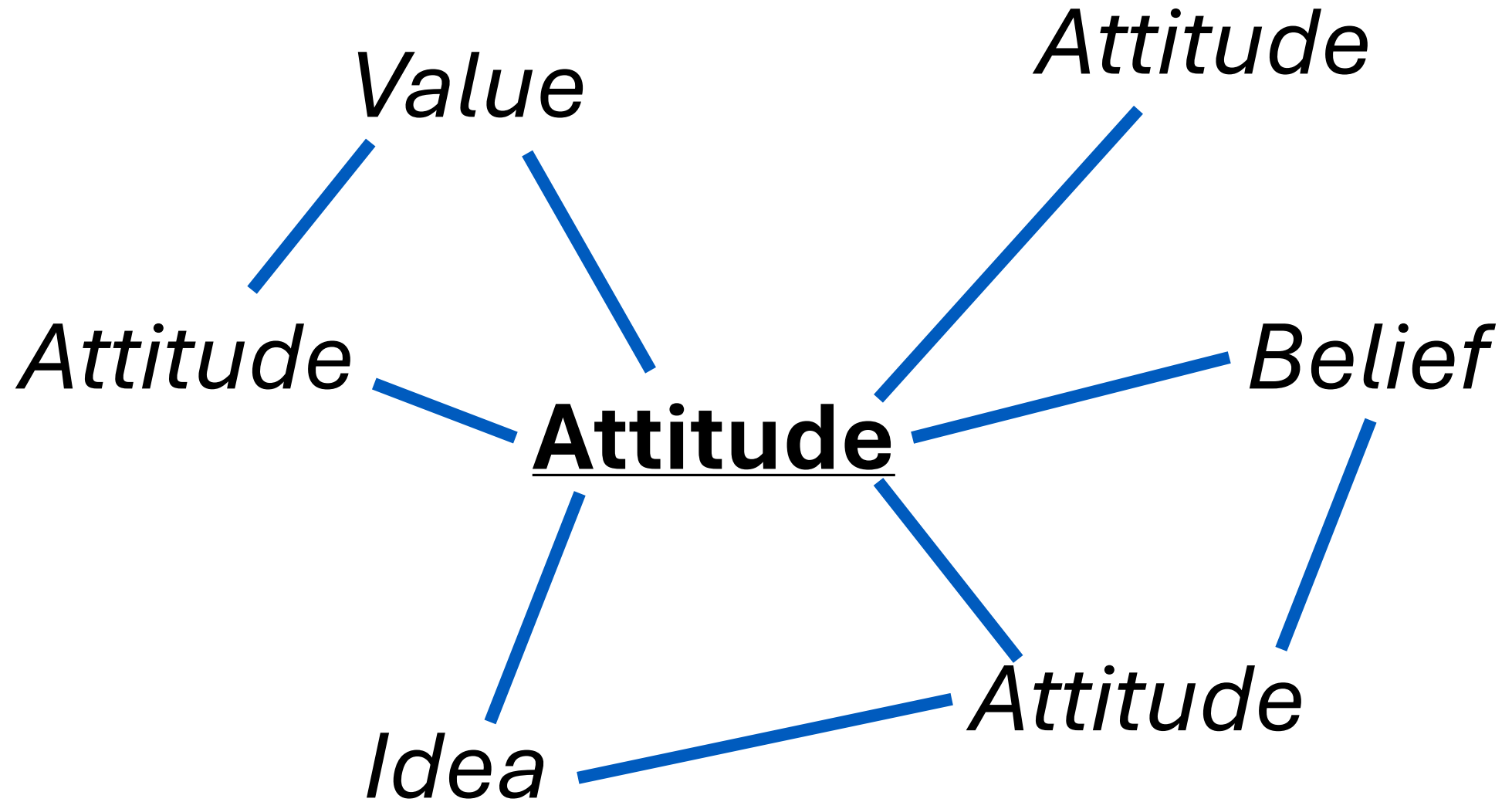
Tacos

Education Policy

Attitude







What is central?

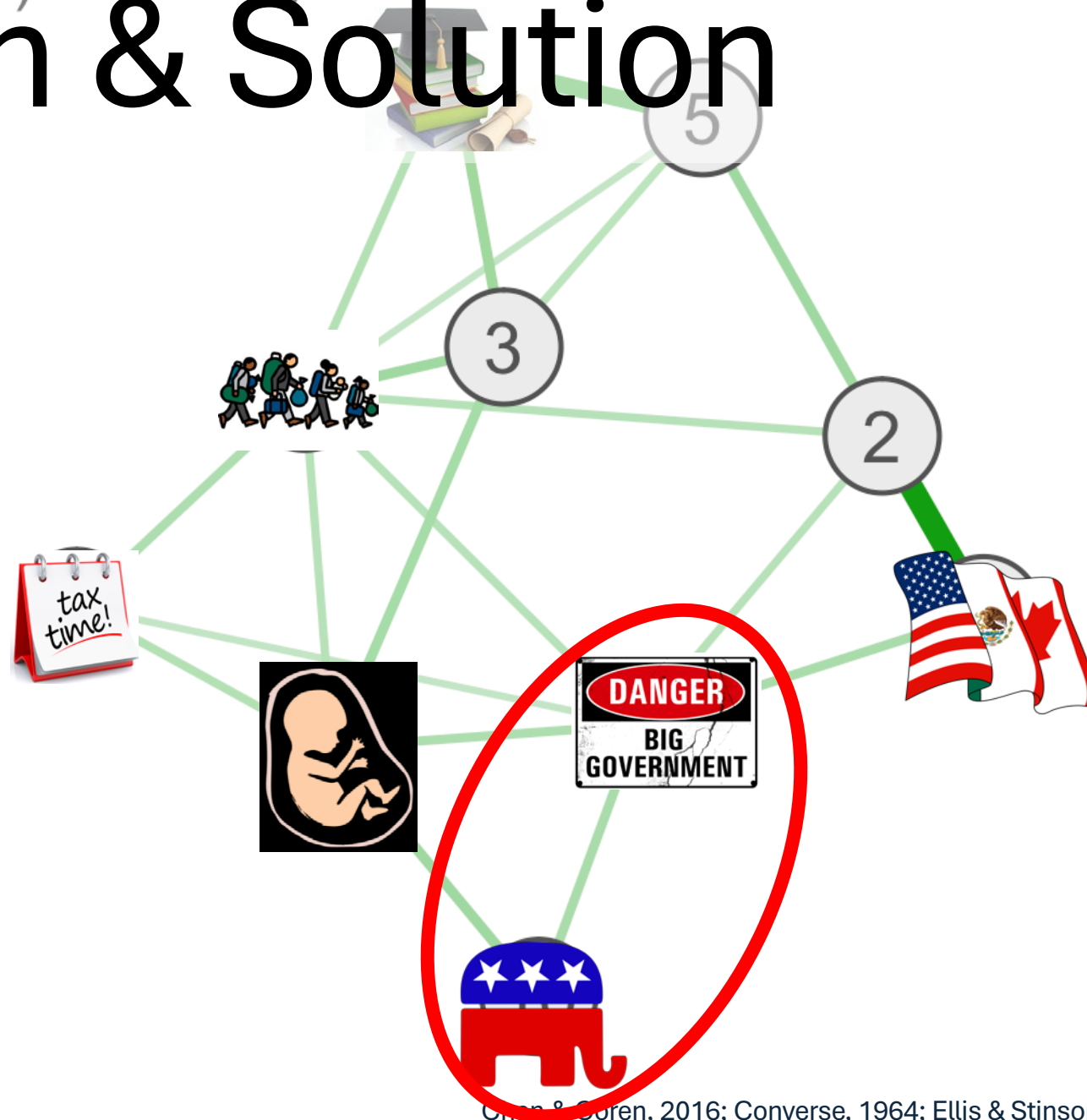


Symbolic



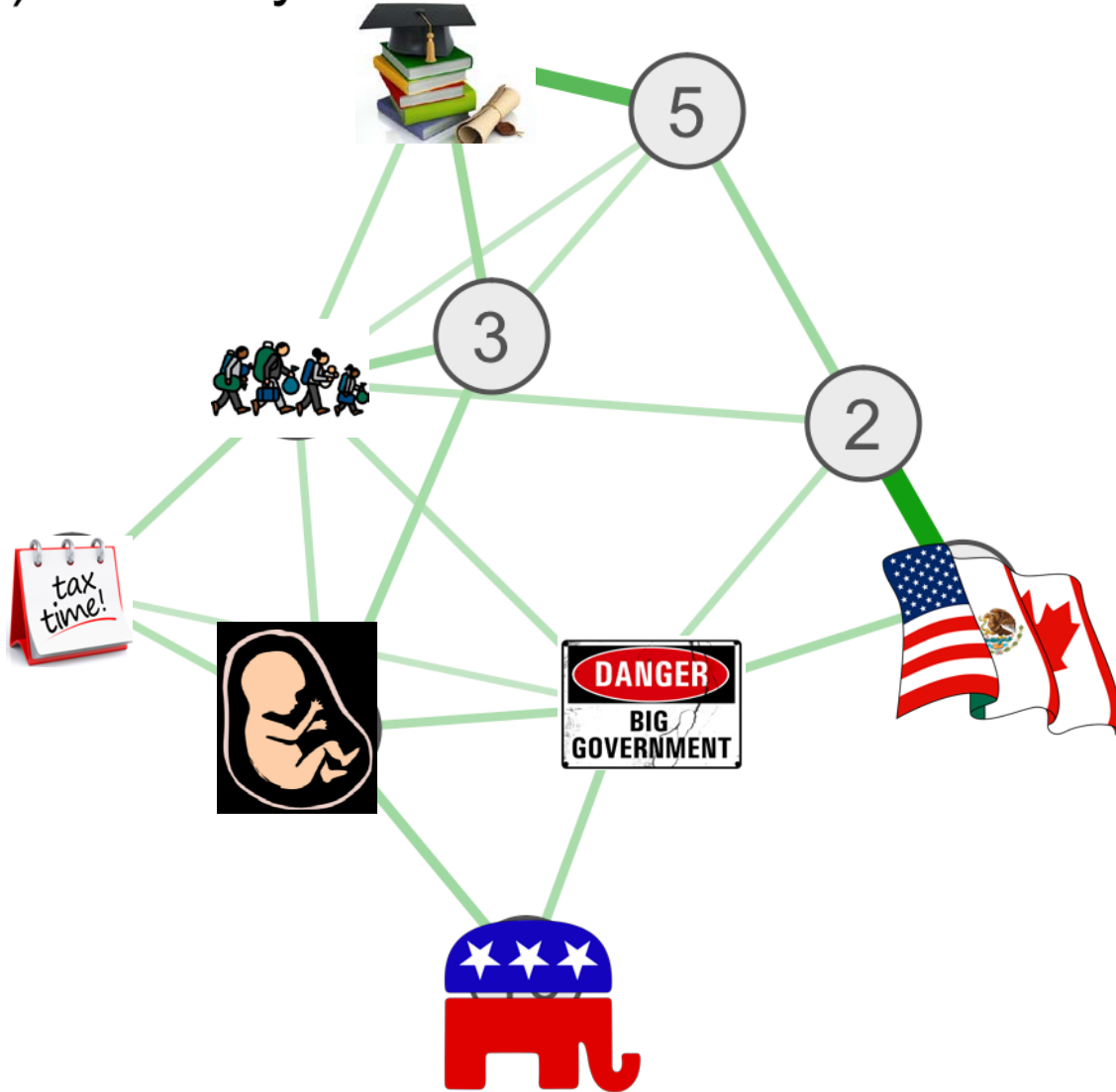
Operational

Problem & Solution



Node Centrality

B) Belief System Network



Strength: How strong a node is connected to its immediate neighbors

Closeness: How “fast” a node can influence the other nodes

Betweenness: How often a node sits on the shortest paths between two other nodes

New Zealand Attitudes & Values Survey

Representative sample (N's = 4,441 – 18,256)

7 waves (2009 – 2015)

50 measures (not always available)

10 symbolic (party support, liberal-conservative ID, etc.)

40 operational (Maori people, taxes, gay marriage, trade, etc.)

Coded: higher = more conservative/right-wing



Chris Sibley &
Danny Osborne

Collaborators



Ideological identity

Positive
LASSO'd partial
correlation



Ideological identity



Civil Unions

Positive
LASSO'd partial
correlation



Ideological identity

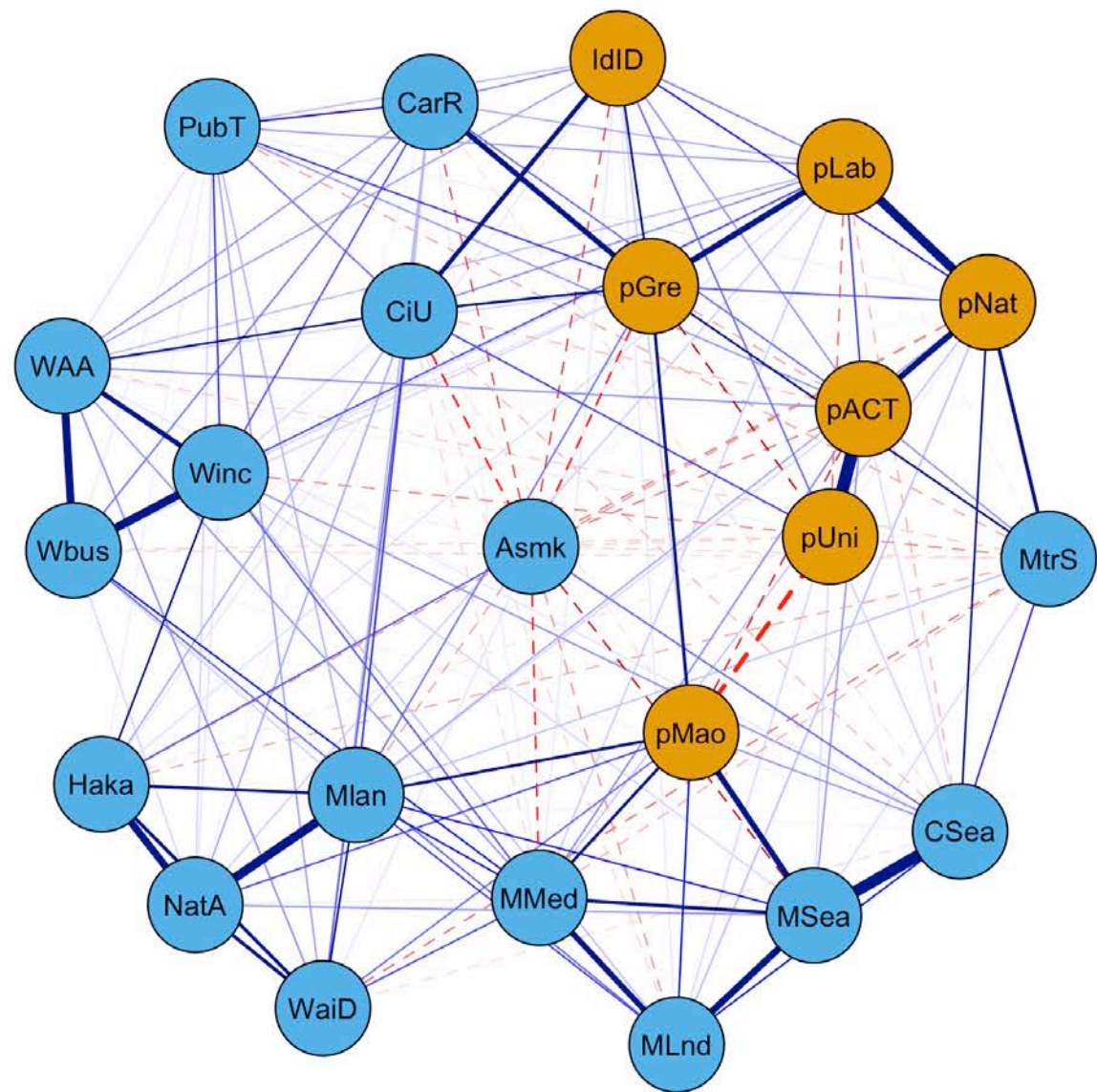


Civil Unions

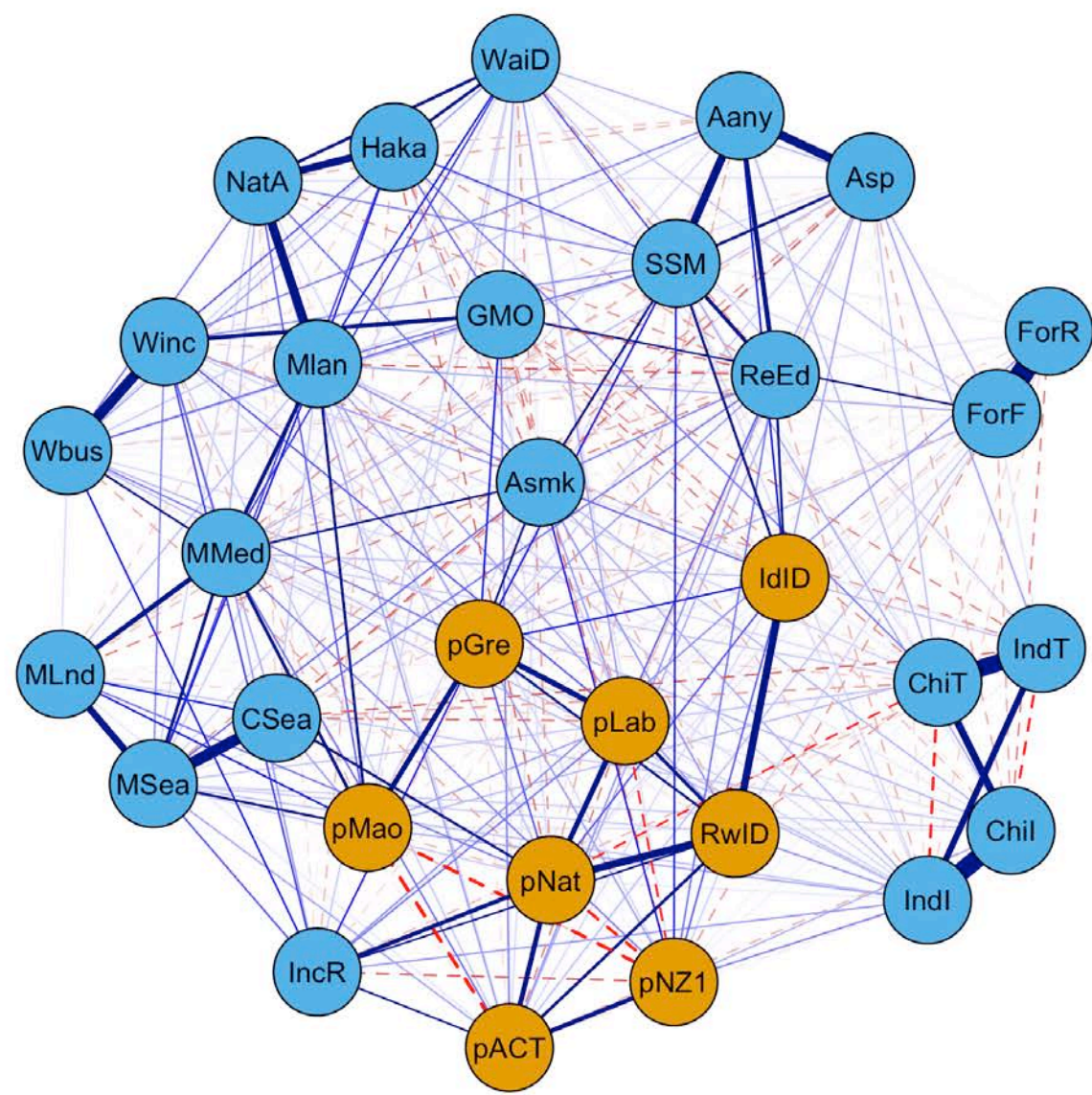


Weaker positive
LASSO'd partial
correlation

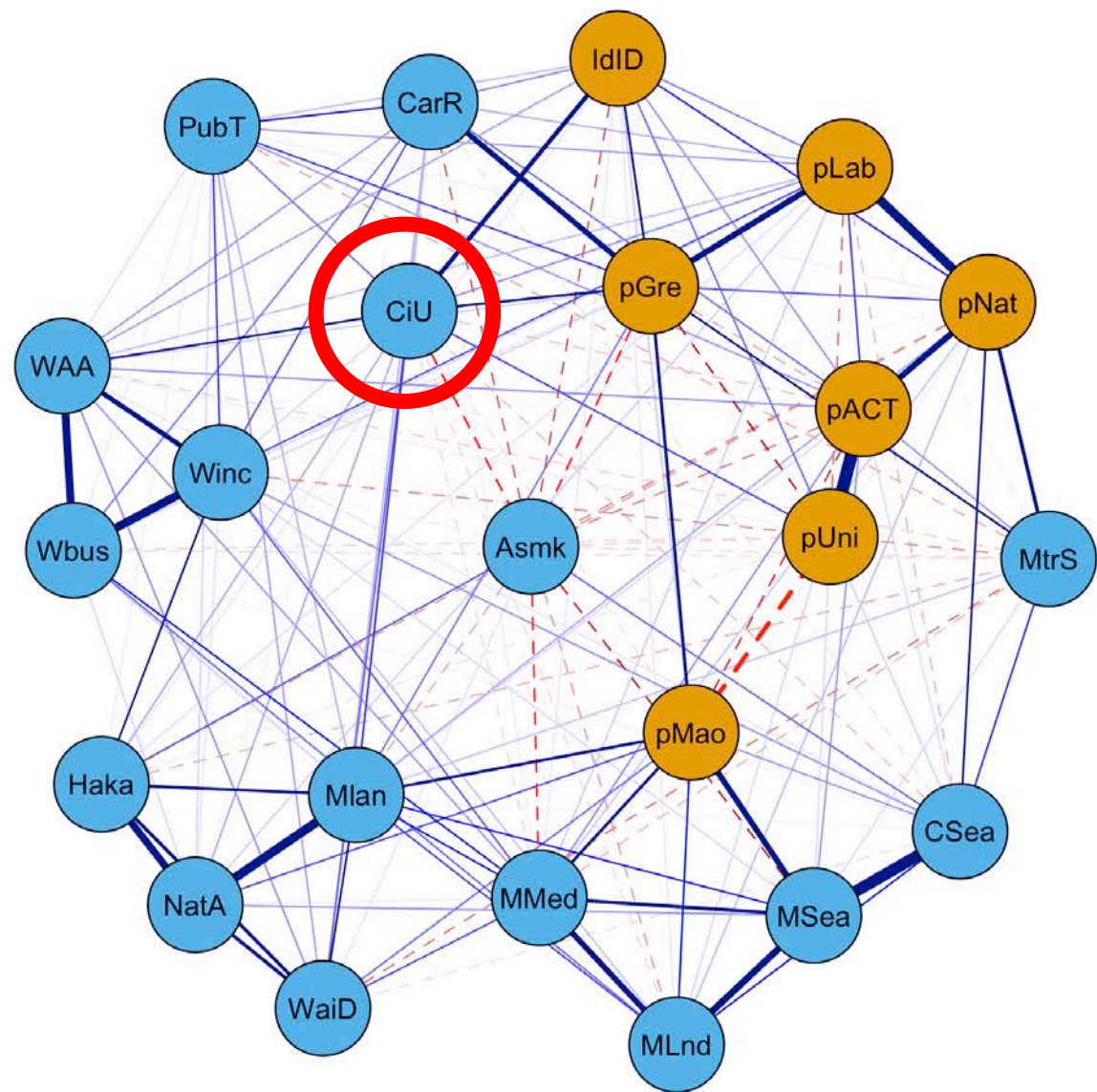
2009



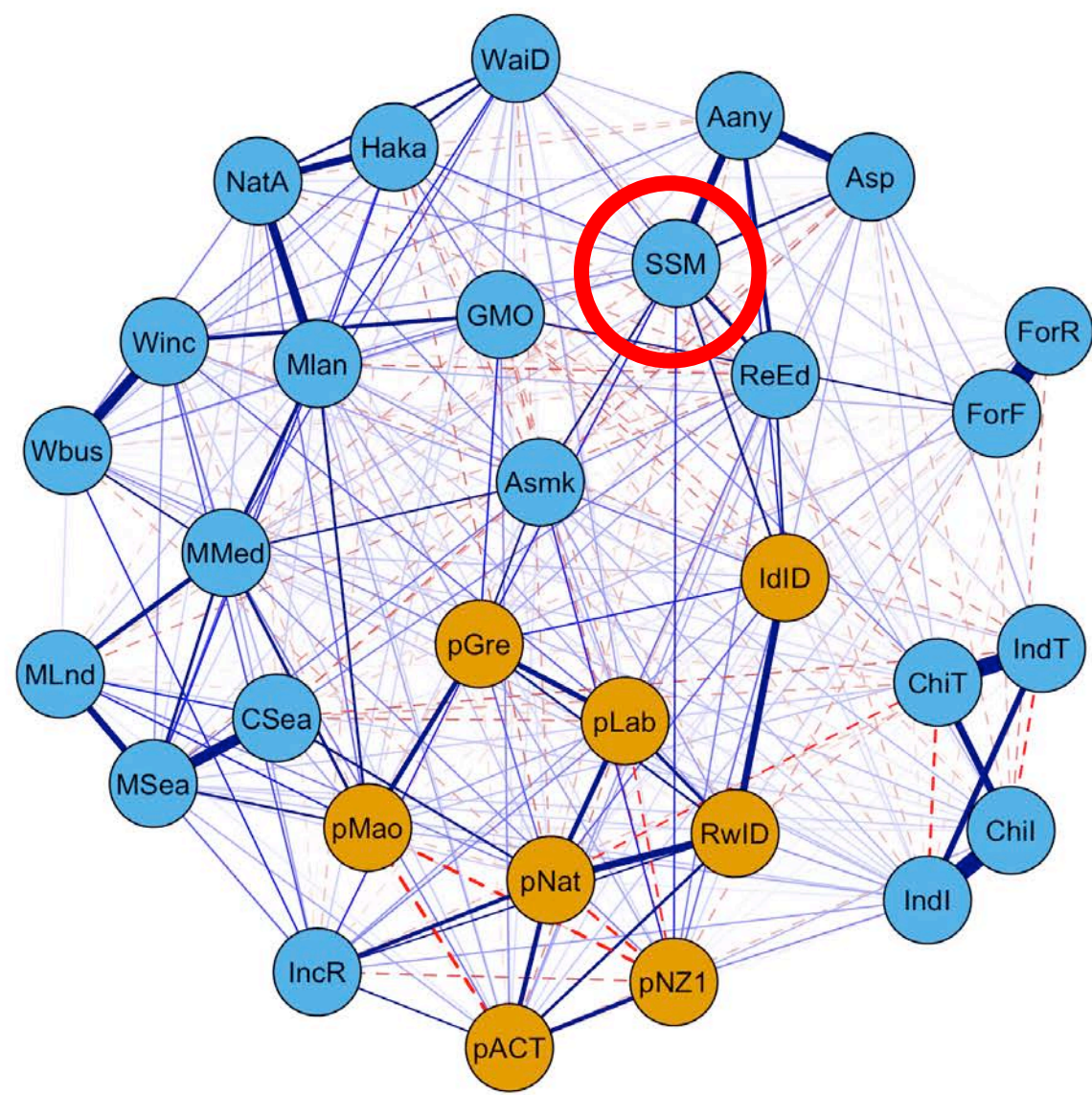
2015



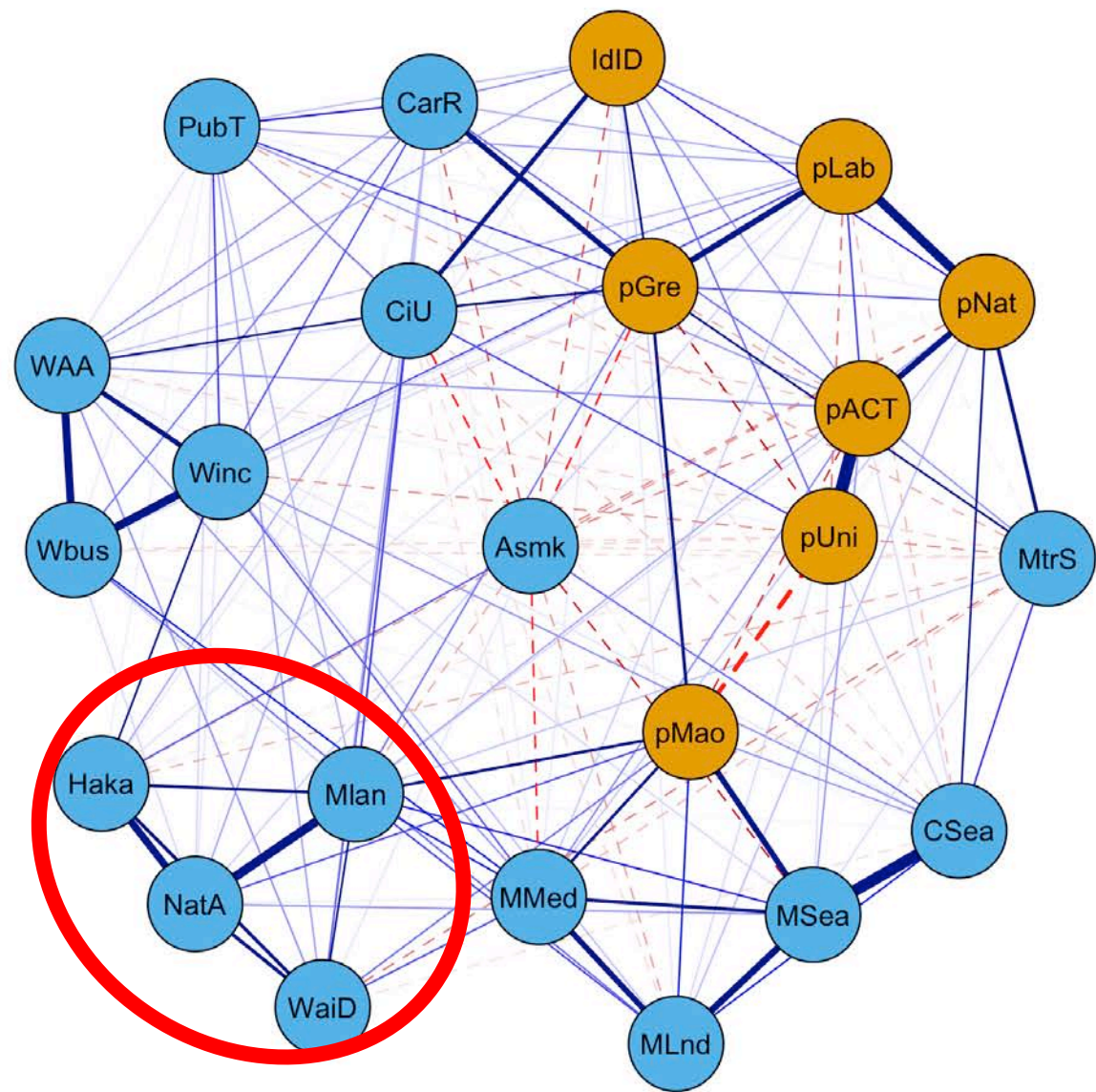
2009



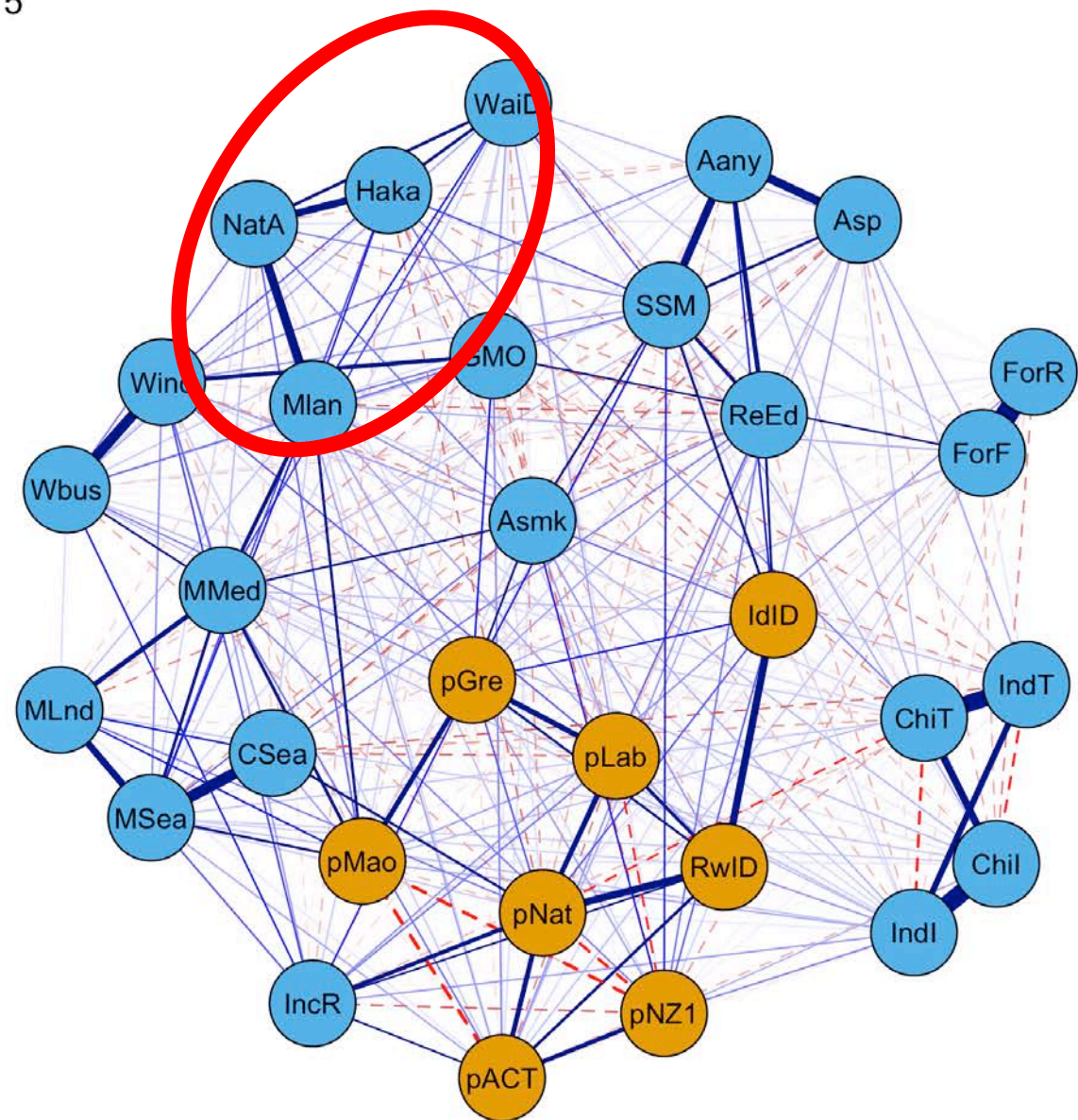
2015

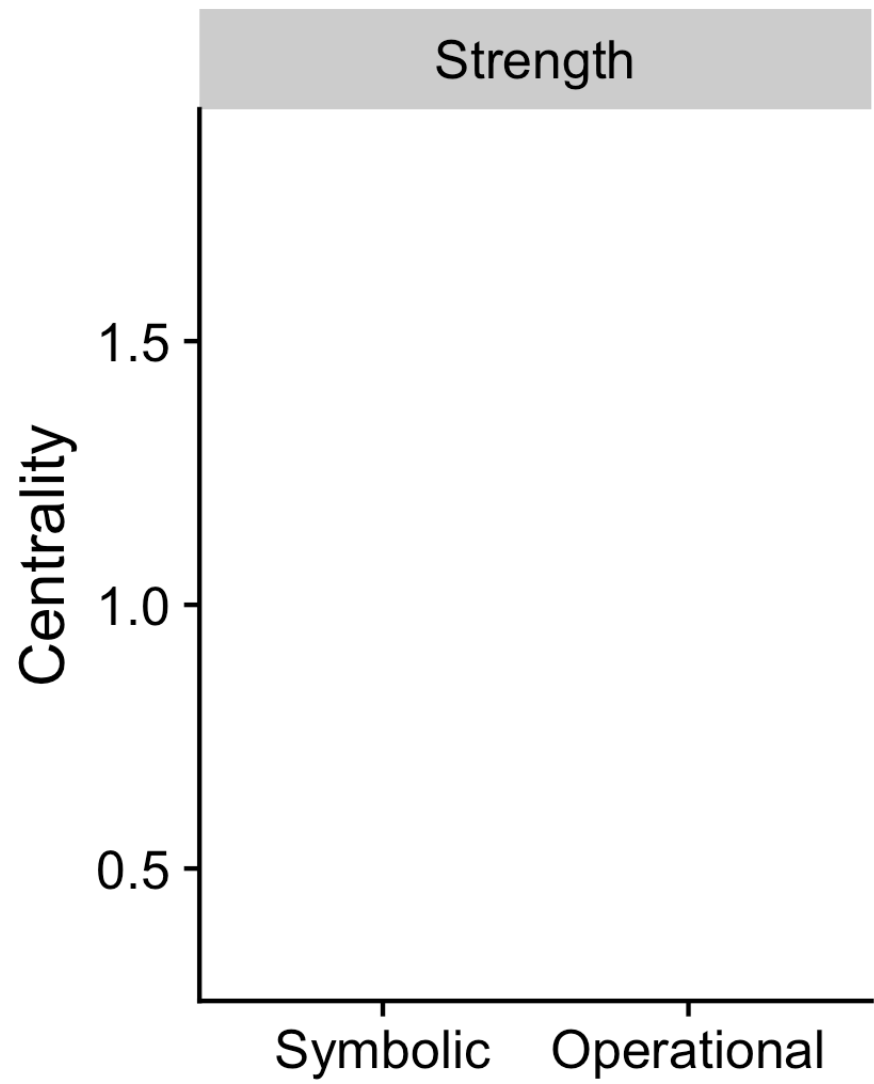


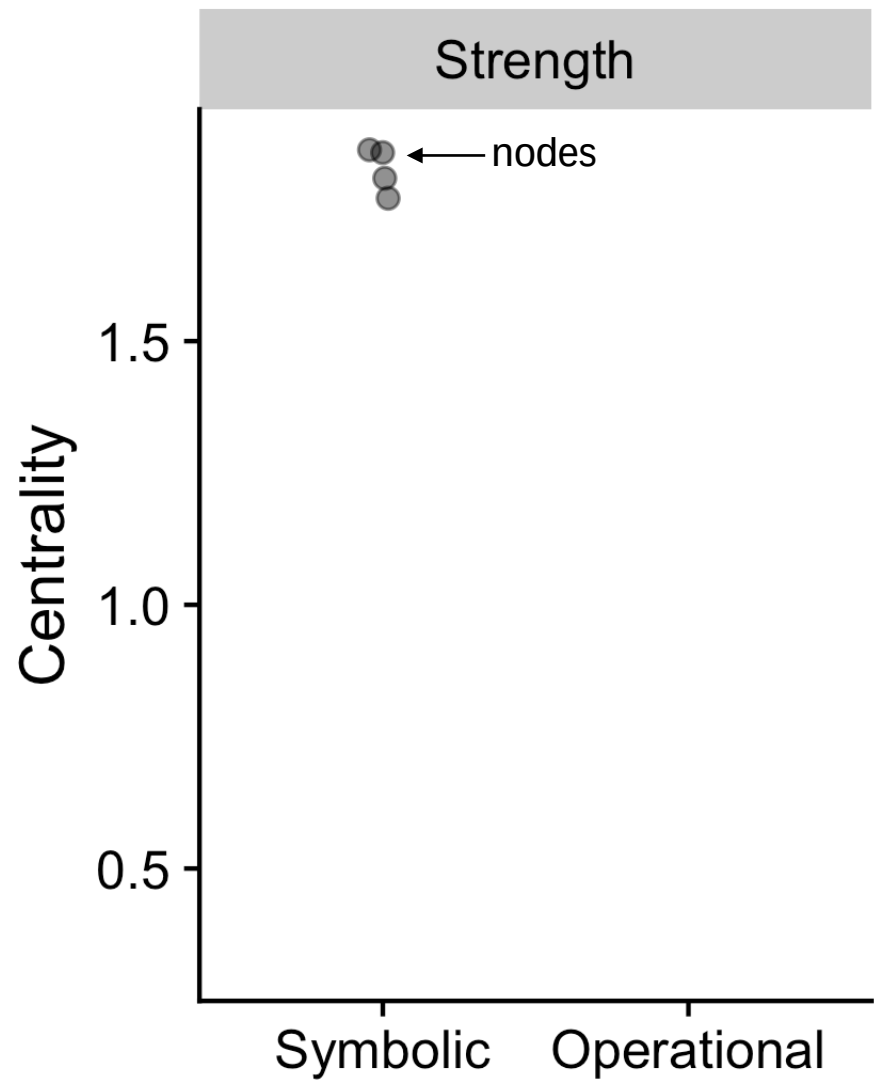
2009

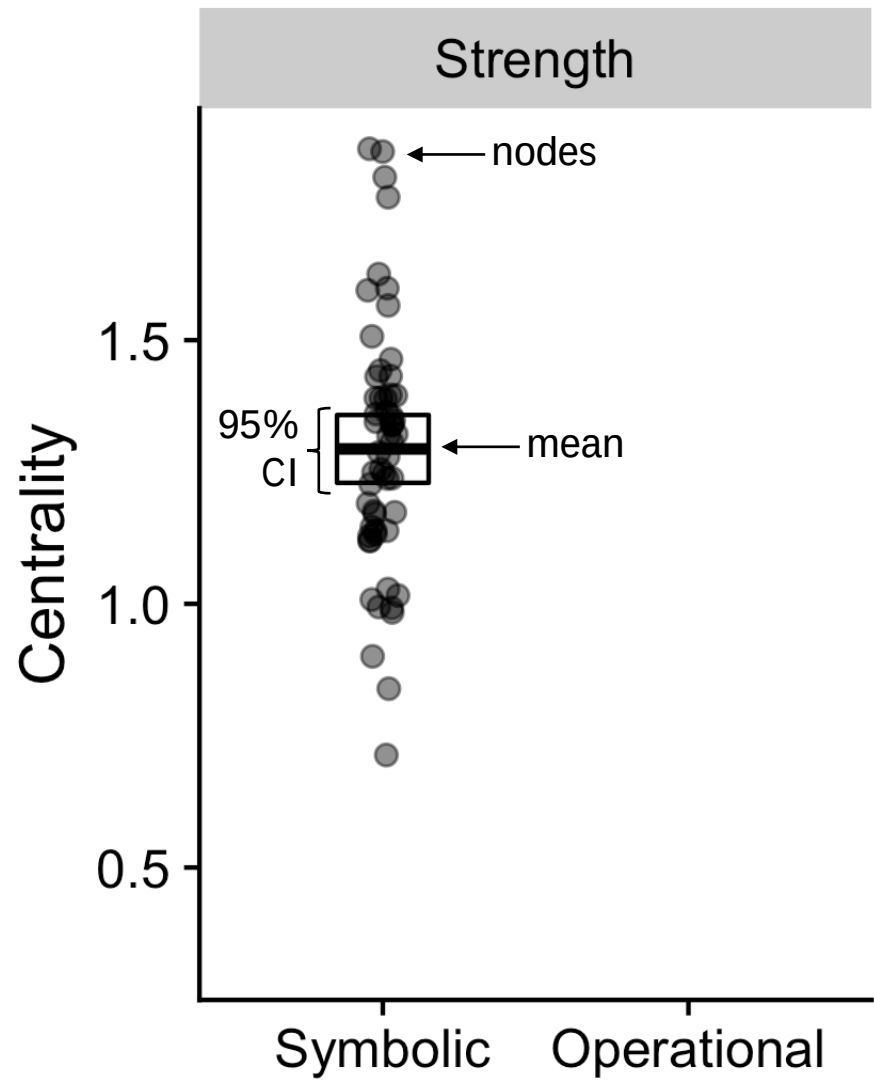


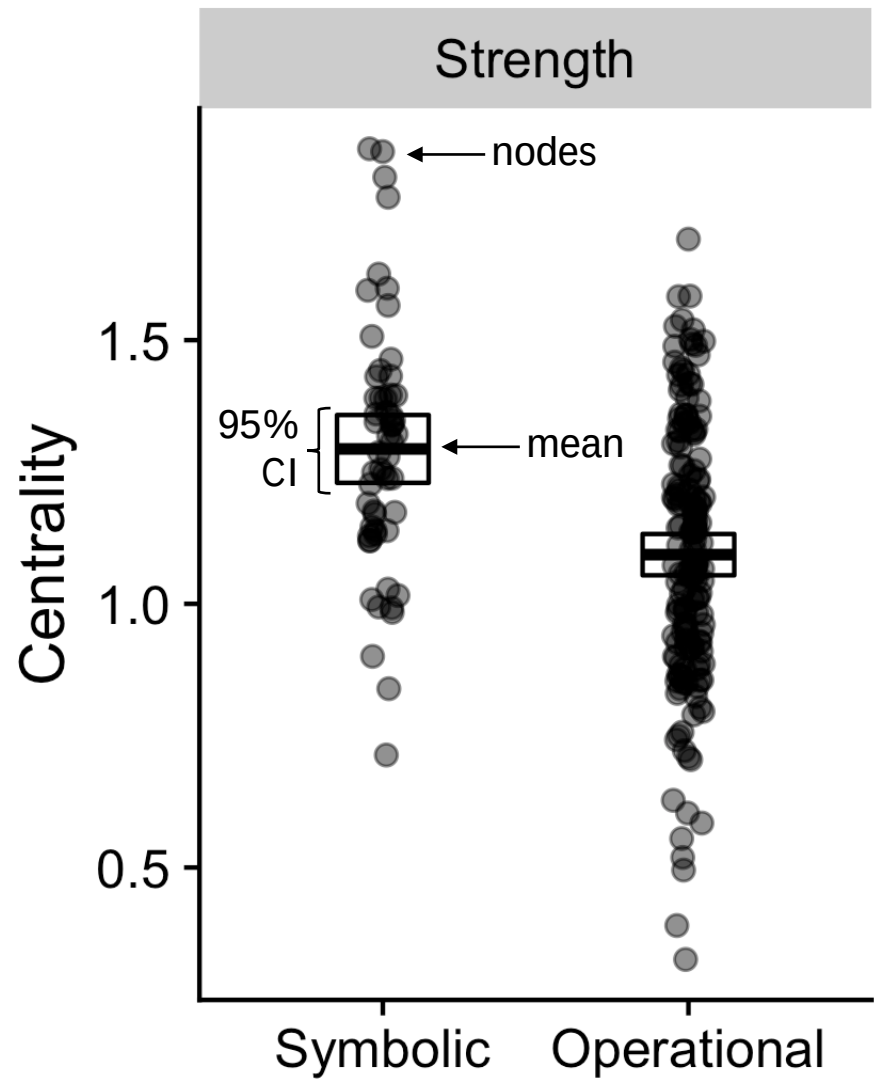
2015







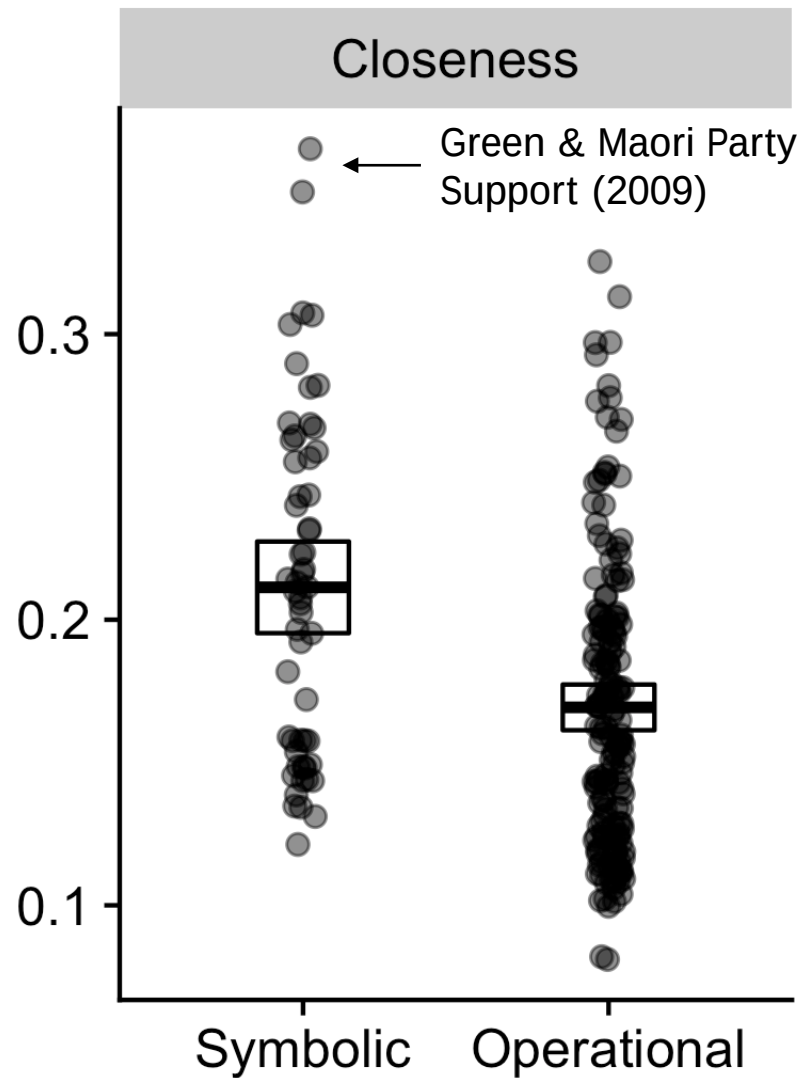
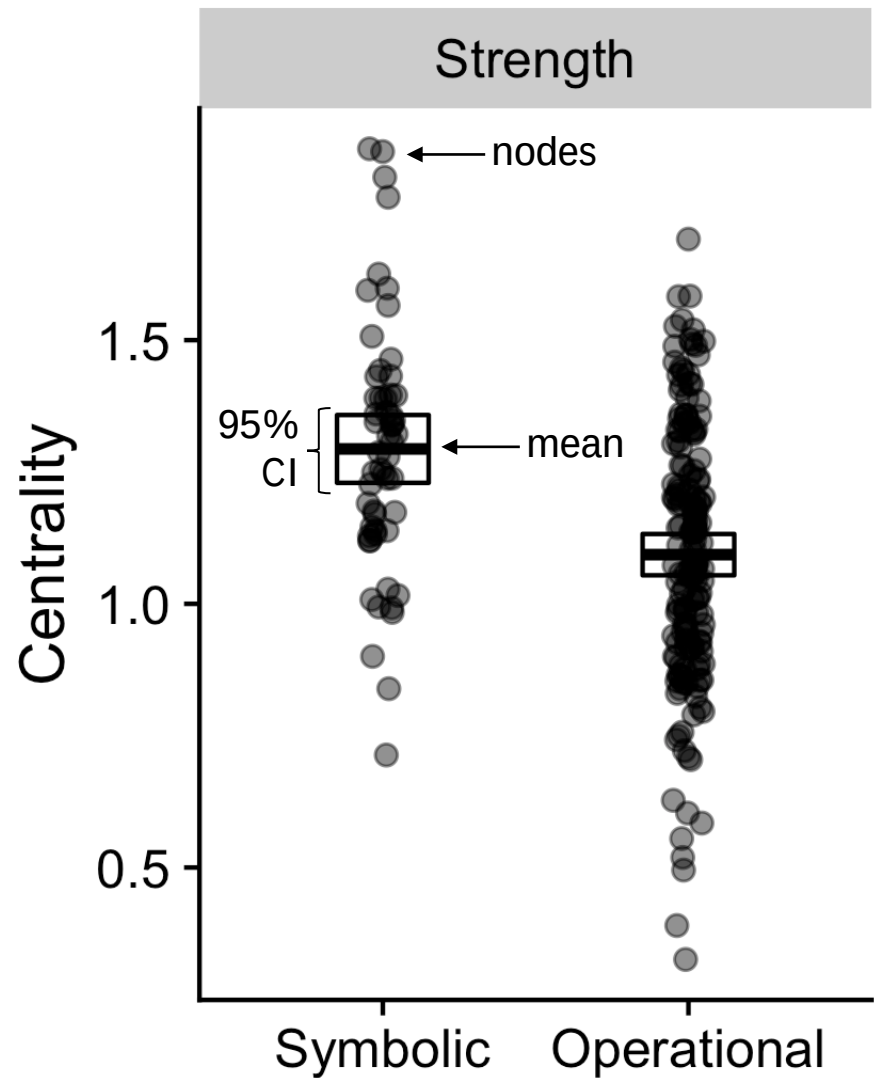




Parametric Statistics

$d = 0.80, 95\%CI [0.49, 1.12]$

$F(1, 204) = 35.01, p < .001$



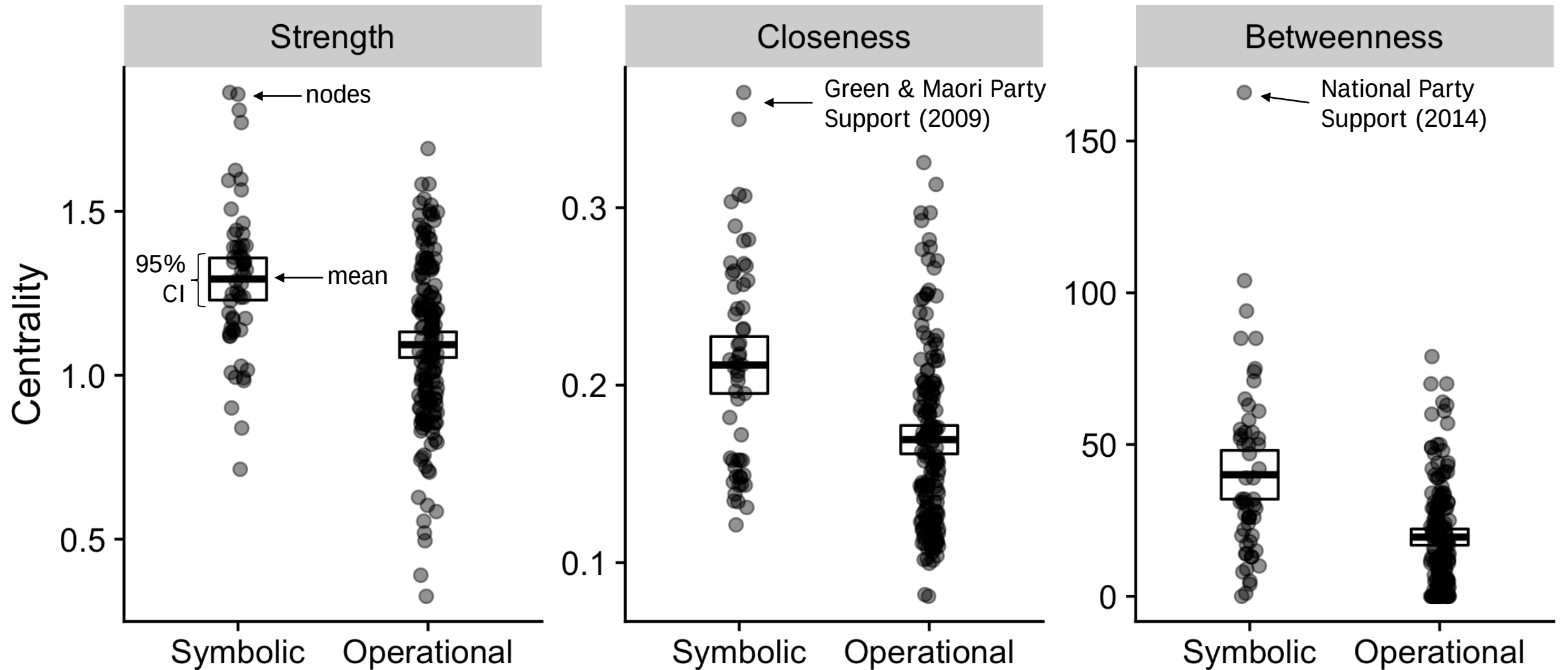
Parametric Statistics

$d = 0.80, 95\%CI [0.49, 1.12]$

$F(1, 204) = 35.01, p < .001$

$d = 0.78, 95\%CI [0.47, 1.09]$

$F(1, 204) = 172.54, p < .001$



Parametric Statistics

$d = 0.80$, 95%CI [0.49, 1.12]	$d = 0.78$, 95%CI [0.47, 1.09]	$d = 0.97$ 95%CI [0.65, 1.29]
$F(1, 204) = 35.01$, $p < .001$	$F(1, 204) = 172.54$, $p < .001$	$F(1, 204) = 40.19$, $p < .001$

What is central?



Symbolic



Operational

Does structure matter?

- We think so
 - Central attitudes are more closely related to behaviors (Brandt et al., 2019)
 - Central attitudes are more stable over time (Cassario & Brandt, in prep)
 - Central attitudes spark more emotion when people try to change them (Cassario & Brandt, in prep)
 - Alternative belief system structures are associated with populist-right voting (van Noord et al., 2025)
 - People with belief system structure that are represented in political parties are more satisfied with democracy (Barbet, 2020)
 - People especially dislike groups who disagree with them, but share a belief system structure (Turner-Zwinkels et al., 2025)

When considering the social landscapes of the 21st century, we need to also include the landscape of people's belief systems

- **Inclusion:** How to central group identities contribute to and undermine inclusion?
- **Well-being:** What beliefs are most relevant for well-being?
- **Equity:** Can we leverage people's belief systems about equity to foster support for more equitable policies?

Take Home Messages

1. We can map the structure of belief systems
2. Group identities are central to political belief systems
3. The structure of belief systems is important for understanding political behavior and attitude change

When considering the social landscapes of the 21st century, we need to also include the landscape of people's belief systems

Thanks! Дякую!